Chatham Area Growth & Renewal Strategic Plan

September 2024

Prepared for the Chatham Rotary Foundation, Inc.

Chatham Area Growth & Renewal Strategic Plan

In collaboration with:
Chatham First Inc.
The Rotary Club of Chatham
The Town of Chatham

Special thanks to:
The Reimagine Chatham Steering Committee and the many community members and leaders who participated in our public engagement efforts throughout this project.

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HILL STUDIO

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INTRODUCTION

Background

"Chatham is a bump in the road in the southern part of Virginia: a small, picturesque town of just over a thousand people, with well-tended Victorians and a downtown known for its handsome redbrick Greek Revival courthouse. Originally a center of commerce for farmers tending the miles of tobacco land surrounding it, Chatham is the seat of Pittsylvania County, named for William Pitt, first Earl of Chatham, a member of the English Parliament who sympathized with the American colonists and objected to unjust taxation. Though somewhat remote, the town has always been high-minded."

An excerpt from Chapter 1 of 'Code Girls:
The Untold Story of the American Women Code Breakers of World War II' (published 2017)

Chatham has historically prided itself on being a beautiful and peaceful place in which to live and raise a family. As the county seat, Chatham's largest employers are the governmental agencies including the county jail, social services, health department, county courts, the county school division, and the various other administrative offices.

Chatham is home for several large businesses including Columbia Forest Products, Davenport Energy, First Piedmont Corp., Ennis Business Forms, and Eastern Panel along with three banks, several insurance and real estate firms, medical offices, and other smaller family run businesses including four restaurants and two specialty shops that dominate the downtown landscape. Chatham is also home to two high quality private preparatory schools, Hargrave Military Academy and Chatham Hall. Both schools contribute to the character of the town and provide Chatham with a relatively high percentage of well-educated people. The faculty and students who are not accounted for in the census increase the population by about 25% for three-quarters of each year represent a significant economic opportunity.

According to the U.S. Census, the population of Chatham has declined from approximately 1,800 in 1970 to approximately 1,200 residents in 2020. Despite the resources of an educated populous, scenic beauty, and numerous successful businesses, the overall population decline

has continued and the tax base has eroded proportionately. A limited town budget has not allowed for funding of economic studies or development of means by which the town may develop a strategy for recovery, which has led to waning business interests, stalled growth, and vacant properties. The gradual population decline experienced over the past 50 years can be directly attributed to the loss of the textile and tobacco industries and lack of economic and community development needed to attract businesses to Chatham and the immediate area. The recently approved comprehensive plan for Chatham clearly cites a number of impediments to the quality of life and economic growth including a shrinking tax base, limited availability of housing, parking, dining, and overnight stay facilities and the lack of resources for economic development and promotion of Chatham. A plan for the future is clearly needed to address these and other issues facing our community.

Reimagine Chatham Initiative

Reimagine Chatham is a collaborative effort aimed at developing a Growth and Renewal Strategic Plan for Chatham and the adjacent area based on a broad community consensus of local needs, desired improvements, and amenities.

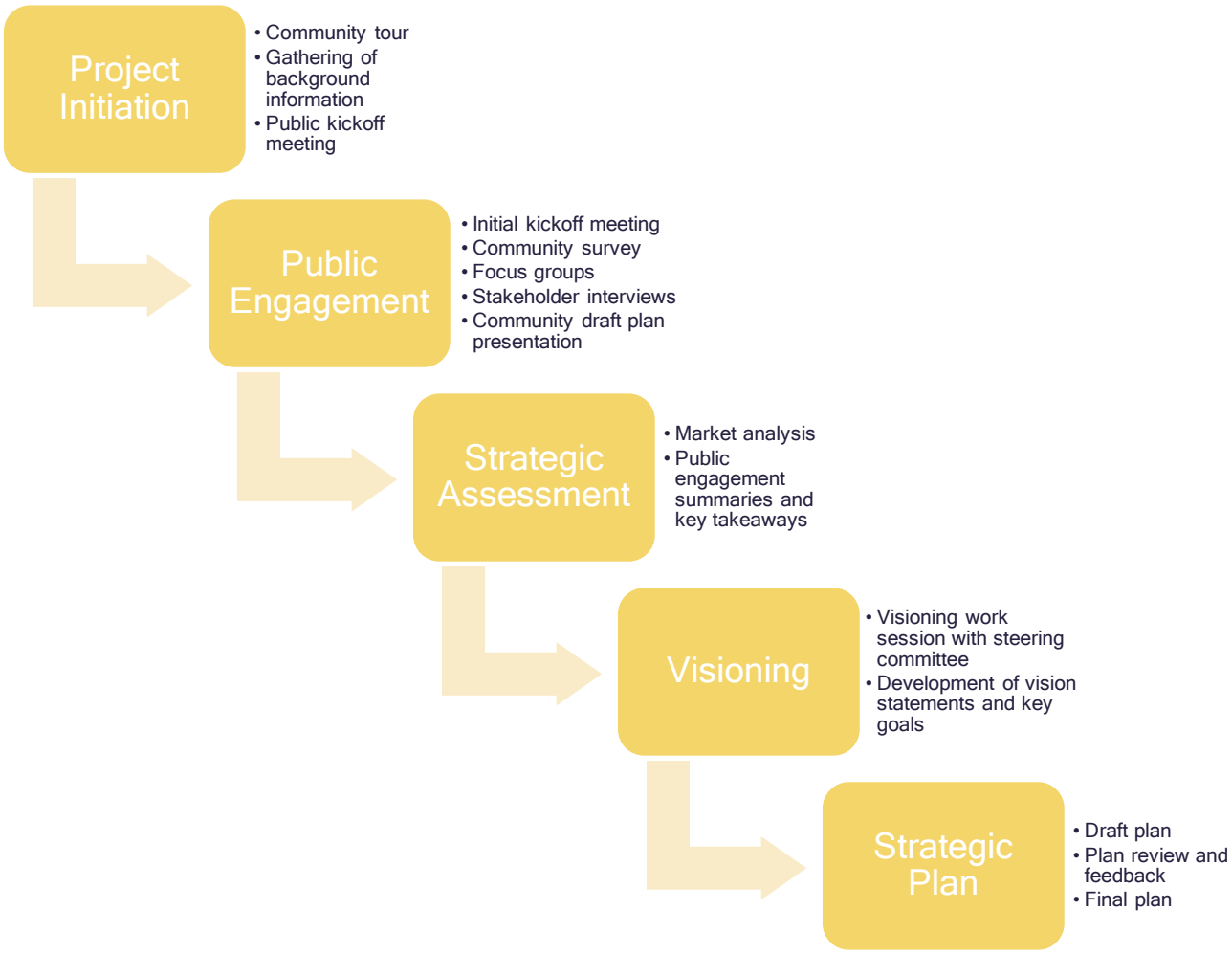
The initial effort is funded by an anonymous grant, in response to an application by a partnership of local civic organizations, specifically the Chatham Rotary Foundation, Chatham First Inc., and The Rotary Club of Chatham. The grant has been administered by a steering committee composed of the civic organizations plus representatives of the Town of Chatham Council and local businesses.

The plan was developed by a consulting team, Hill Studio and Arnett Muldrow, and involved opportunities for public input to help define the community vision for the future. Once adopted, the plan will serve as the basis of future initiatives to develop and implement the specific aspects identified for improving the business environment and quality of life in town.

For more information on this initiative, please visit:
https://chathamrotaryfoundation.org/reimagine-chatham/

Strategic Plan Process

Realizing the need to develop a shared vision for the Chatham area, the Chatham Rotary Foundation hired Hill Studio and Arnett Muldrow & Associates to create a Chatham Area Growth and Renewal Strategic Plan. The plan addresses key factors impacting the Chatham area and recommends a variety of key goals and strategies under four primary topic areas.



Plan Format

This document includes the following key elements:

- Strategic Assessment: Summary of public engagement efforts and key takeaways.
- Market Analysis: Market definition, demographic snapshot, housing & retail summaries.
- The Chatham Area Growth and Renewal Strategic Plan: Includes community amenities, community recreation, housing, and small business and economic development. Each topic section includes a vision statement, key goals, and strategies for each goal.
- An Implementation Strategy Board: Summaries the strategies proposed under each goal, identifies the level of priority, and outlines responsible agencies/organizations.

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

Public Engagement Strategy

The Chatham Area Growth and Renewal Strategic Plan was strongly guided by public engagement, ensuring that the community's voice was central to the planning process. Prior to kickoff, the Steering Committee conducted an extensive public awareness campaign, culminating with a mass mailout of informational materials to over 4,000 area addresses. The project kickoff event, which was open to the public, set the tone by bringing together about 40 residents to share their initial thoughts and concerns. This was followed by a comprehensive online community survey reflecting a wide range of perspectives. The plan further benefited from in-depth discussions from focus groups, which were organized around key topics. By also incorporating insights from stakeholder interviews with representatives from critical sectors, the strategic plan was crafted to align closely with the community's needs and aspirations, making it a truly collaborative effort. Below is a summary of the key public engagement strategies:

Project Kickoff

- Open to the public; approximately 40 attendees

Community Survey

- Live from May 29th – July 24th
- 451 responses

Focus Groups

- Two focus groups on each topic; eight focus groups total
    - Housing
    - Community Amenities
    - Community Recreation
    - Small Businesses

Stakeholder Interviews representing:

- Large Employer
- Local Events
- Town Manager
- Town Mayor
- County Economic Development
- Historical Society
- Youth
- Pittsylvania County Parks and Recreation
- Hargrave Military Academy

Project Kickoff Event

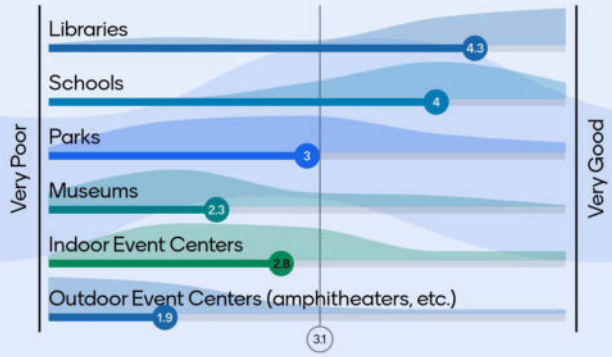
The kickoff event, on May 14th, 2024, was held in the evening at the Pittsylvania County Community Center. This event was open to the public and was intended to learn from community members about their perspective of Chatham, what they would like to see for Chatham's future, and what concerns they might have related to this plan. The Project Team facilitated a live poll to capture a broad range of perspectives. The following pages include highlights from the live polling exercise.

A comprehensive document of the results can be found in Appendix A.

Photos from the public kickoff event May 14th, 2024

Mentimeter

What are your thoughts on these Community Services?



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Mentimeter

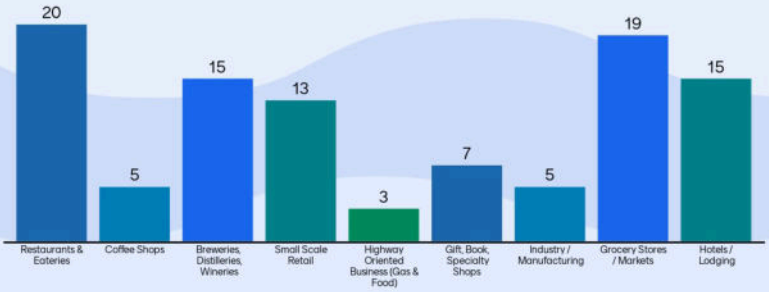
When you think of Chatham's Business Climate, what comes to mind?

42 responses

22

Mentimeter

What businesses do you think Chatham needs?



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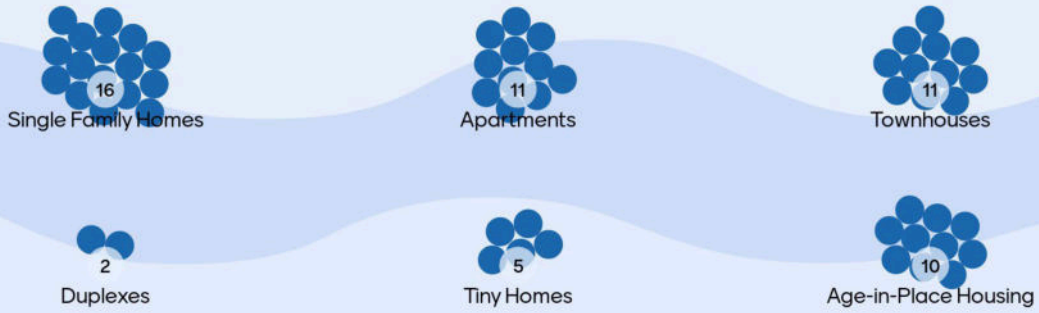
Mentimeter

What are your thoughts on Housing in Chatham?

21

Mentimeter

What type(s) of housing do you think is needed in Chatham?



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Mentimeter

Looking over the next 5-10 years, what is your vision for Chatham?

44 responses

20

Community Survey Snapshot

The community survey, hosted online via Qualtrics, was live from May 29th, 2024, to July 24th, 2024. In total, 451 responses were received. The survey consisted of 23 questions that asked participants to provide input on community character, perceptions of Chatham, community needs, and basic demographic information. Below is a breakdown of the characteristics of the respondents:

Relationship to Chatham

- 63% of respondents live in Chatham
- 39% of respondents work in Chatham
- 44% of respondents have lived in Chatham for more than 20 years
- 20% of respondents have lived in Chatham for 2-5 years

Age

- 24% of respondents are between 25-34 years of age
- 17% of respondents are between 45-54 years of age
- 17% of respondents are between 55-64 years of age

Ethnicity

- 79% of respondents identify as White; 10% of respondents identify as Black

Gender

- 52% of respondents identify as female; 43% of respondents identify as male

Education

- 35% of respondents hold a Bachelor's degree
- 26% of respondents hold a Master's or PhD degree

Income

- 16% of respondents earn more than $150,000 annually
- 14% of respondents earn between $100,000 and $149,999 annually

A question-by-question summary of the survey results can be found in Appendix B.

Key Takeaways – Survey

The following summarizes the key findings from the community survey.

Respondents appreciate...

- Chatham's sense of community
- Chatham's quaintness
- Chatham's walkability
- Local businesses like Callands Coffee, El Cazador, J&Ts, Shadetree Rare Books
- Pittsylvania County Public Library
- The presence of Hargrave and Chatham Hall
- Scenic beauty

Respondents wish for…

- More restaurants (notably a breakfast option, brewery or tasting room, family-friendly eateries, and an ice cream shop)
- Greater access to local produce and goods
- More childcare options
- More senior services
- A hotel
- Affordable and diverse housing options
- Community gathering spaces
- More things to do/entertainment options

Respondents envision a Chatham that...

- Has expanded small businesses and restaurants in a vibrant downtown
- Is a destination for day trips and provides multiple entertainment options
- Has affordable and diverse housing opportunities
- Retains its historic aesthetic and small-town charm, but with modern amenities
- Supports entrepreneurship and small businesses
- Provides family-friendly amenities and activities
- Celebrates its history and cultural heritage
- Is economically diverse
- Has strong community engagement
- Remains safe and community-oriented

Focus Groups Snapshot

The focus groups were held on June 17 and 20, 2024. There were eight focus groups in total; two focus groups on each topic: community amenities, community recreation, housing, and small business. Below is a summary of each topic area:

Community Amenities

Residents discussed enhancing community amenities such as pools, playgrounds, and public facilities, while also improving public services and child-friendly spaces. The meeting highlighted existing strengths like walkability, local businesses, and Hargrave's sports facilities, as well as the need for more dining options. Emphasis was placed on civic engagement, preserving significant buildings, affordable childcare, and addressing the impact of online shopping. Proposed solutions included a community van system and possibly leveraging church and school buses for transport. Promoting historical sites, engaging the African American community through the NAACP, and ensuring accessible services and events were key points. Additionally, addressing employment challenges for young professionals and forming event partnerships were discussed to foster community growth while preserving its character.

Community Recreation

Participants discussed a range of topics aimed at enhancing quality of life and recreational amenities. They emphasized the desire for planning future park developments, including playground equipment donations and maintenance. The value of parks like Frances Hurt and Wayside Park for community engagement was highlighted, along with the importance of local government and organizations in recreational development.

Representatives advocated for new amenities such as splash pads, accessible parks, expanded walking trails, and adult recreation facilities. Leveraging resources from Chatham Hall and Hargrave Military Academy for broader community use was discussed, alongside overcoming communication and funding challenges. Engaging the Sugar Hill community and proposing an international festival to celebrate diversity were also key points.

The group addressed Chatham's future strategies, including the potential of expanding the tax base, enhancing safety and amenities, and using outdoor recreation to attract families. The significance of community input and events like the Christmas parade and Fourth of July street

fair was underscored. Participants also stressed the importance of organizational alignment to implement these strategies effectively. Overall, the meeting combined discussions on improving recreational amenities, fostering community engagement, and promoting strategic growth.

Housing

The discussion on Chatham's housing situation highlighted the impact of COVID-19, the nearby casino, and Airbnb on housing affordability and availability, with increased rental demand and a preference for modern homes. Emphasis was placed on the need for development incentives, addressing restrictive zoning laws, and tackling the scarcity of affordable housing through ordinance revisions and incentives to increase housing stock. The importance of enforcing the no single wide trailer ordinance, promoting diverse, affordable housing, and utilizing historic tax credits was noted. Participants stressed the roles of the city council and contractors in facilitating housing development and shared experiences with infrastructure challenges. The meeting also covered the evolution of affordable housing and Chatham's housing needs, highlighting the Danville Neighborhood Development Corporation's efforts in home revitalization. The significance of local government support and funding mechanisms involving HUD, DHCD, and the Western Piedmont Planning District Commission were also discussed.

Small Business

In Chatham, Virginia, business discussions addressed challenges with the Danville Community Development Authority, property acquisition, and navigating the post-COVID-19 landscape. The dialogue emphasized the necessity of supporting small businesses, contrasting family-owned ventures with investor-led projects while highlighting consumer alignment. Key points included the role of Chatham First and the significance of the Longwood Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in fostering public-private partnerships through grants and resources. Attendees discussed enhancing Chatham's development and the economic impact of niche businesses, stressing the importance of community support, visibility strategies, and infrastructure improvements. The need for diverse dining, nurturing the local entrepreneurial spirit, and the potential for new projects were highlighted, emphasizing the community's unique appeal and the challenges it faces.

Key Takeaways – Focus Groups

The following summarizes the key findings from the eight focus groups:

Community Amenities

- There is a desire for enhanced community amenities, particularly child-friendly spaces
    - Community gathering areas
    - Community events
- Affordable childcare is highly desired
- Access to local produce/goods desired
- Accessibility within Town is a concern
    - Transportation a top priority
    - Desire for improved walkability and trails
- There is a desire to promote historical sites
- There are partnership opportunities with Hargrave and Chatham Hall

Community Recreation

- Local parks are highly valued, and there are opportunities for improvements/enhanced amenities
- The County-run Community Center is an amazing amenity, but could be utilized better
    - Weekend hours?
    - More events for youth
    - Consistent event times
- New or improved amenities desired
    - Splash pad
    - Expanded walking and hiking trails
    - More parks
- Opportunities for public use of Hargrave and Chatham Hall amenities

Housing

- COVID-19's impact
- Affordability and availability of housing is a significant concern
- What housing types are appropriate for Chatham?
- There is increased rental demand
- People are looking for modern amenities
- Significant need for senior housing
- New housing should be compatible with existing housing
- Opportunities for second floor downtown housing
- What can we learn from Danville's efforts to encourage housing development?
- How can Chatham attract builders and developers?

Small Business

- Small businesses need more support
    - From the Town, County, other businesses, and residents
- Desires for specific businesses
    - Co-op market for local goods and produce
    - Breakfast place, ice cream shop, brewery
- How can we ensure new businesses can survive?
- Need for more marketing of downtown area
    - Explore funding opportunities
- Opportunity to establish Chatham as a destination
- Desire for a uniform, strategic effort amongst businesses and throughout downtown

MARKET ANALYSIS

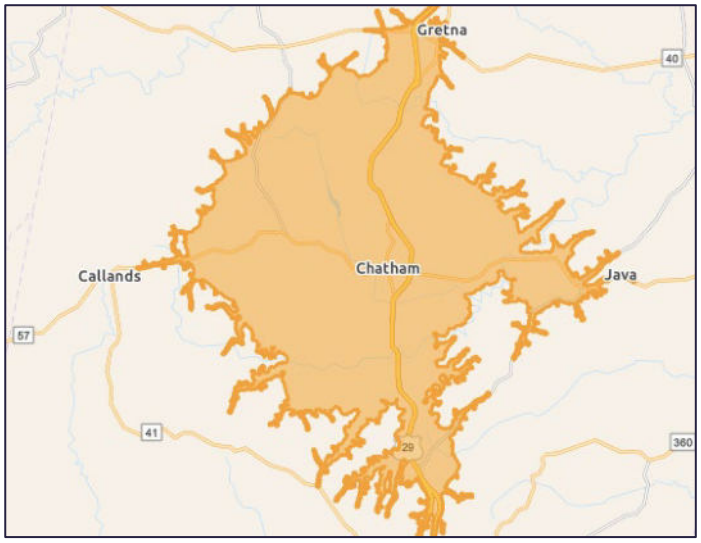
Introduction

The Chatham Growth and Renewal Plan is a market-based study whereby a comprehensive market analysis was conducted to identify specific opportunities for business and economic growth, while also informing the vision, goals and strategies in this plan. The study included:

- Market definition that determined the local trade area relevant to the Chatham community.
- Demographic snapshot that examined trends in population and income in Chatham and surrounding area.
- Retail study that looked at supply and demand to identify gaps in the market showing demand for new or expanded businesses.
- Residential study that examined trends in housing in Chatham.

Market Definition

Chatham lies in the center of Pittsylvania County, which at 978 square miles, is the largest county in the Commonwealth. As the seat of Pittsylvania, Chatham serves the 60,000 residents of this primarily rural county. The community is about 30 minutes from the City of Danville, and approximately 45 minutes from the southern portion of Lynchburg.



While Chatham is far enough away from these two metros that it can be self-sufficient, it has the benefit of being close enough to enjoy commerce, employment, and culture that they afford. Proximity to these metros certainly impact Chatham's market base, as people living in the northern and southern portions of the county are closer to the larger cities. For the purposes of this study therefore, the primary trade area for Chatham is a 20-minute drive which reaches the rural area surrounding and closest to the Chatham community. A 30-minute drive could be considered the secondary trade area.

Demographic Snapshot

The 20 and 30-minute drive times were used to identify regional market trends and opportunities, but we also looked at multiple other geographics beginning with the Town limits. From there, we compared data including the 24531 Chatham zip code, Pittsylvania County, Danville Micropolitan Area, as well as nearby cities and towns with the larger region. Our demographic data comes from the US Census Bureau, as well as Claritas, a national data service used by planners, consultants, and private businesses for their market research.

Population

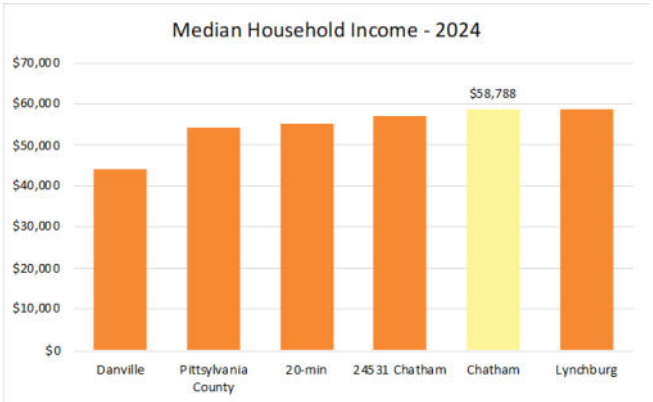
According to Claritas, Chatham has an estimated 2024 population of 1,214 residents. While the Town's population declined by 2.9% between 2010 and 2020 census, its population is projected to be stable over the next five years. Both Pittsylvania County (-4.7%) and Danville metro (-3.3%) declined during this time period, while the Lynchburg MSA grew (3.4%).

Age

The Median Age in Chatham in 2024 is estimated to be 48.8 according to Claritas, which is slightly older than Pittsylvania County (48.1) and Danville metro (46.2). This is common in rural areas with declining population. Lynchburg's median age is significantly lower (31.55). In Chatham, 42% of the population is age 55+ with 28% being 55-74.

Income

Chatham's estimated median household income in 2024 ($58,788) is higher than most of the region, second only to Blairs ($74974)



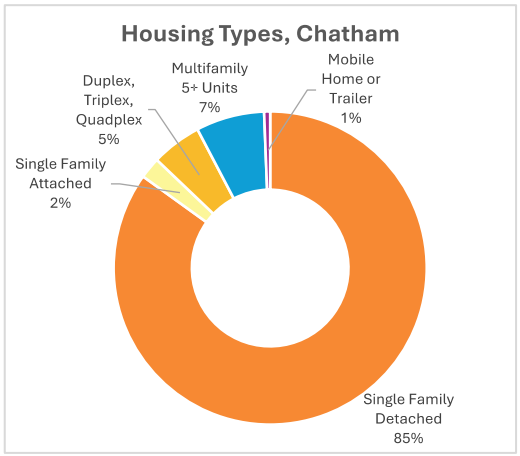
Other

- Chatham is 64% White and 27% Black.
- 24% of residents age 25+ have at least a Bachelor's degree with more than half having a bachelor's, associates, or some college education.
- Median household size in Chatham is 2.09 people, suggesting fewer households with children present than its regional neighbors.

Housing

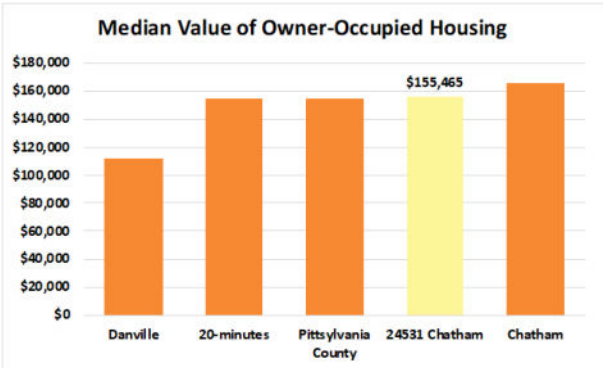
Type and Tenure

The Town of Chatham's housing stock is 85% single-family detached, and 12% is multi-family. 57% of the housing is occupied by owners, while 43% is rental. Pittsylvania County is 76% owner-occupied. Much like other historic small towns, Chatham has an older housing stock with just 16% of housing units have been built in the past 34 years. 28% of all of the housing was built prior to 1940.


Housing Types, Chatham
Duplex, Triplex, Quadplex 5%
Multifamily 5+ Units 7%
Mobile Home or Trailer 1%
Single Family Attached 2%
Single Family Detached 85%

Housing Value

The median value of owner-occupied homes in Chatham is estimated to be $165,477 which is higher than Pittsylvania County ($154,723) and Danville ($111,977). Only Blairs ($170,511) is higher than Chatham within Pittsylvania County. Lynchburg has seen more recent growth and development, and its median housing value is $216,034. For the Chatham 24531 zip code, Zillow shows a median value of $154,000. This figure represents a 9.8% increase in value from 2023.



Retail

Leakage

"Retail Leakage" refers to the difference between the retail expenditures by residents living in an area and the retail sales produced by the stores located in the same area. If consumer expenditures in an area are higher than retail sales in the same area, then the area is said to be "leaking." Conversely, if retail sales in an area are higher than consumer expenditures, the area is said to be "gaining." All the following data comes from Nielsen Claritas.

	Chatham	20-Minute Drivetime	30-Minute Drivetime
Stores Sell	$48.4 million	$219.1 million	$1.76 billion
Residents Spend	$25.3 million	$391.8 million	$1.7 billion
Market Leaks/Gains	$23.1 m GAIN	$172.7 m LEAKAGE	$56.1 m GAIN

In the town limits of Chatham, where much of the business in the area is located, stores sold $48.4 million in the previous year while residents who *live* in Chatham spent just $25.3 million. (It is important to note that this refers to what reisdents spend everywhere, including online shoping). Therefore, Chatham actually gained commerce, meaning that it is pulling customers in beyond what the town's residents consume. Note that these figures do not include the Tightsqueeze area, which is the major retail center in this part of Chatham County.

Based on the market definition exercise at the beginning of this chapter, we estimate that Chatham's primary trade area is a 20-minute drive time from the center of the community. This is the "bread-and-butter" market for Chatham businesses, and covers much of the rural area of Pittsylvania County. Based on the supply & demand leakage study, this trade area *leaked* over $172 million last year. While this may suggest local businesses are not serving the needs of the residents, this leakage translates directly to demand. The chart below shows some of the main categories showing potential for growth.

Of course, Chatham can not expect to recapture 100 percent of the commerce that is leaking from its trade areas. Customers will continue to shop online for certain goods while also continuing to shop in nearby communities. However, with dedicated economic development, recruitment and marketing, Chatham can reasonably expect to recapture a portion of the leakage. We are illustrating a conservative scenario here showing if Chatham were to recapture just 10% of the leakage in the trade area, it could support approximately 57,846 square feet of additional retail space.

This only takes into account the local market's consumer buying power, so does not include the potential for growth if Chatham is able to capitalize better on the Highway 29 traffic that passes through each day, or capitalize on activity generators such as ODAC, Hargrave, and Chatham Hall. The true potential is likely higher than 57,846 square feet.

Key opportunities for Chatham would include:

General Merchandising – There is demand for up to 18,401 square feet of space. A typical Dollar General type operation is approximately 15,000 square feet. Chatham has a Family Dollar in downtown, and a Dollar General in Tightsqueeze, and this data suggest the potential for another similar product.

Restaurants – Demand exists for about 10,655 square feet of restaurants space. Of the $19 million in leakage in the "Restaurants and Other Eating Places" category, about $12 million is in the "full-service" category, meaning sit-down restaurants like Hunt & Company or El Cazador. The remainder of demand in that category is in limited-service restaurants, like fast food. A typical independent restaurant can be anywhere from 2,500 square feet to 5,000sf or so. Demand suggest that Chatham could support another 2-4 restaurants in town.

Clothing – This category shows demand for 3,701 square feet of space. Most leakage ($6.7 million) is in family clothing, while women's ($1.8m) and children's ($500k) also show demand.

Furniture & Home Furnishings – There is demand for about 2,806 square feet in this combined category.

Specialty Shopping – A number of other categories show opportunity for expansion of existing businesses, or new merchandising. These include:

- Electronics & Appliances – 1,757 square feet
- Hardware – 1,015 square feet
- Grocery – 2,626 square feet
- Shoes – 1,007 square feet
- Jewelry & Leather Goods – 1,039 square feet
- Hobby – 637 square feet
- Book Stores – 315 square feet
- Gifts & Office Supplies - 817 square feet
- Antiques & consignment – 655 square feet

CHATHAM AREA GROWTH & RENEWAL STRATEGIC PLAN

Plan Elements and Goals

Stakeholder and public input have been organized into four key topic areas, each reflecting a core element of the Growth and Renewal Strategic Plan. Goals and strategies have been established for each theme to guide the plan's implementation and outline the intended outcomes.

Topic Area 1: Community Amenities

The goals and strategies for enhancing community amenities in Chatham, VA, focus on expanding the town's identity and fostering a shared vision through updated planning efforts, including pursuing a Downtown Master Plan grant and updating the Comprehensive Plan. Key initiatives include community and downtown branding, creating appealing gateways, expanding the historic district, and leveraging strong community engagement, particularly involving the African American community in decision-making. The goals also emphasize boosting tourism through product development and exploring small-scale lodging options. Additionally, it aims to create vibrant community gathering spaces, promote the library as a hub, and host events like a summer concert series. To increase access to local goods, strategies include establishing a community garden, a downtown produce storefront, and enhancing retail opportunities. Improving accessibility through expanded parking, sidewalk extensions, and volunteer-driven transportation services, especially to grocery stores, are also key components of the plan.

Chatham will be a vibrant, family-friendly community where our historic charm is enhanced by world-class cultural amenities, inclusive recreational spaces, and safe, walkable, and bikeable neighborhoods, all thoughtfully connected with engaging signage and wayfinding.

Goals Summary:

- Expand community identity and create a shared vision for Chatham
- Determine Chatham’s tourism draw
- Create community gathering spaces and events
- Increase access to local goods and produce
- Improve accessibility within town

1.1: Expand community identity and create a shared vision for Chatham

To expand Chatham's identity and create a shared vision for the community, a multi-faceted approach will need to be undertaken. Strategies for leveraging local amenities to attract and retain residents, while balancing growth and preserving the town's character, are central. The identity of Chatham starts from major thoroughfares, including Routes 29 and 57. To develop gateways as a sequence to draw people to and through the community involves creating a welcoming, memorable entrance that reflects the town's character and draws travelers into the community. This may include the following initiatives:

- Clear banks on highway entrances of debris and landscape in a clean, uniform manner. When necessary, work with private property owners.
- Install welcome signs that include community and downtown planning and wayfinding.
- Encourage property owners adjacent to entrances to clean up their properties and remove or camouflage blight.
- Repair the underpass on Route 57 and consider painting with community branding, such as the historic railroad seal.

Examples of existing gateways

Also critical to expanding Chatham's community identity is to create a community and downtown brand. A community brand serves as the identity of a town, city, or region, encapsulating its essence, values, and unique characteristics. It is more than just a logo or tagline; it is a strategic tool that communicates the community's story to residents, visitors, businesses, and potential investors. By using consistent imagery, messaging, and design elements, a community brand helps create a cohesive identity that people recognize and associate with the community. A downtown brand is more specific, focusing exclusively on the downtown area of a community. It highlights the unique characteristics, businesses, events, and attractions within a business district.

Get Outside in NORTON

Case study of a successful community branding effort in Norton, VA

Branding can be a powerful tool that influences perception, drives economic growth, fosters community pride, and helps guide the overall development of an area.

To create a shared vision for downtown Chatham, the Town should pursue a Business District Revitalization Planning Grant through the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). This grant is intended to assist localities in undertaking activities that identify opportunities to improve the economic and physical conditions within the community. These grants require significant local capacity, so localities are required to identify how the various responsibilities will be handled and additional resources that can be contributed to the effort. The grant itself requires an Economic Restructuring Plan that identifies how the locality can implement economic improvement strategies that will help ensure the long-term sustainability of the community, particularly the downtown business district. It will also require a building façade improvement plan. This planning grant will open the door to DHCD implementation funding for identified projects and initiatives.

Downtown Chatham. Photo credit: Terry Kelley

Another key initiative is to update the Town of Chatham's Comprehensive Plan to ensure a strategic framework for growth. A comprehensive plan is a long-term strategic document that guides the overall growth, development, and land use of a community, typically covering a 20- to 30-year period. It serves as a blueprint for decision-making by local governments, ensuring that development aligns with the community's goals, values, and needs. (The plan was revised prior to the development of this strategic planning effort and thus should be reviewed and updated to provide compatibility between the document and this report.)

Municipalities are required to update or amend a Comprehensive Plan every five years. Although the Town's Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2023, it is recommended to update before 2028 if there is capacity. There is an opportunity to create a more visionary and action-oriented plan that includes an updated Future Land Use Map (FLUM).

There is also a significant opportunity to expand the Town's historic district or identify new historic districts in the town limits. Study Areas have been identified along N. Main Street to the corporate limits to include Gilbert's Restaurant, and west along 57 West / Depot Street to the railroad to encompass the areas of Sugar Hill, Ridge Street, and the history center. To accomplish this, an assessment of all properties adjacent to the existing district boundaries will be required to determine their potential to contribute to the existing district or a new district. Once the boundaries for either an expanded or new district are identified, the number of properties to be surveyed can be determined. This information will assist in developing an estimated cost, schedule, and funding source to complete the survey and nomination process

It is also recommended that the Town consider updating the Period of Significance (POS) for the existing Chatom Historic District, which currently extends from 1807 to 1950. Such an update will serve to encompass the more recent history of the town during the post-World War II era. Depending on the historical significance of the district, non-contributing resources dating between 1950 and 1974 (the fifty-year mark defined by the National Register as historic), may be reclassified as contributing to the historic district if they retain sufficient physical integrity. Such an update will result in resources built

Gilbert's Restaurant. Photo credit: Joe Rogers

between 1950 and 1974, such as the 1954 Armory at 326 S. Main Street and the ca. 1970 law offices on Payne Street, to become eligible for participation in the state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credit programs.

One thing that sets the Chatham area apart from many other communities is the strong sense of community and civic engagement. To leverage Chatham's strong community engagement and volunteerism, the following are recommended:

- Create or expand volunteer networks, including a volunteer database
- Empower community-led initiatives
- Foster partnerships with local organizations
- Recognize and reward volunteers
- Involve volunteers in planning and decision-making
- Launch high-impact, visible projects
- Ensure clear communication and leadership
- Align projects with community values and interests
- Measure and share impact

It is also essential to engage with the African American community in Chatham to address their specific needs, ensuring their voices are heard and they are actively involved in local decision-making. This inclusive approach will help build a more cohesive and representative community, aligning with the broader vision of a united and vibrant Chatham. The following are recommendations to consider:

- Build trust and relationships
- Partner with local leaders and organizations
- Ensure representation in decision-making
- Empower and support leadership development
- Facilitate open, safe dialogue and listening sessions
- Celebrate and honor African American culture and history
- Implement projects and initiatives that promote equity
- Monitor progress and stay accountable

1.2: Determine Chatham's tourism draw

To determine Chatham's tourism draw, it is essential to explore and develop products that enhance and support the town's appeal to visitors. This includes leveraging Chatham's unique markets, particularly those associated with its large private schools and the visitors they attract. By capitalizing on the influx of families, alumni, and prospective students, Chatham can tailor tourism products to cater to this demographic, such as cultural events, local dining experiences, and curated tours of the town and its historic sites.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to explore lodging options to accommodate visitors, which could be a significant draw for tourism. By examining case studies such as the Hotel Floyd, Inn at Wise, and other boutique lodging establishments, Chatham can identify successful models that could be adapted to its context. These examples highlight how small-scale, locally owned lodgings can create a unique, intimate experience for visitors while also contributing to the local economy. Establishing similar accommodations in Chatham could attract more tourists, particularly those seeking a personalized and comfortable stay in a charming, small-town setting. More information on potential lodging solutions can be found in section 4.3.

Case study of Hotel Floyd in Floyd, VA, a 40-unit lodge.
Photo credit: Hotel Floyd

1.3: Create community gathering spaces and events

Community gathering spaces and events play a vital role in fostering social connections, enhancing the quality of life, and strengthening the fabric of a community. One strategy is to incorporate sitting areas throughout the community, such as Adirondack chairs in Frances Hurt Park. Sitting areas in downtown and parks can significantly enhance the community's public spaces. These sitting areas offer residents and visitors comfortable spots to relax, socialize, and enjoy the surroundings, fostering a sense of community and encouraging more foot traffic in downtown areas. Strategically placing seating in parks and along key pedestrian routes can also create inviting environments for people of all ages to gather, whether for a casual conversation, a moment of rest, or simply to enjoy the natural beauty of the area. Such amenities contribute to the vibrancy of public spaces, making them more attractive and accessible to everyone.

Throughout the public engagement for the Chatham Growth and Renewal Strategic Plan, we learned how beloved the Pittsylvania County Public Library is. We also heard a desire to promote the library's services and role as a community meeting place. To increase utilization of the library, the County and its partners can promote its services and emphasize its role as a central community meeting place. They should highlight the library's diverse offerings, such as educational programs, workshops, and events, while showcasing its facilities as a welcoming venue for community gatherings, meetings, and social interactions. This includes continuing and expanding the library's digital presence. By actively marketing the library's resources and events, the library can attract more visitors, encourage community engagement, and enhance its position as a vital resource and hub within the community.

Pittsylvania County Public Library

Throughout the community engagement, we heard a desire for more community events. Community events are crucial for several reasons, contributing significantly to the social, economic, and cultural well-being of a community. To host more community events is a significant undertaking for civic organizations, the Town of Chatham, and other involved stakeholders. With a broader volunteer base (a strategy under Goal 1.1), community leaders may have more capacity to host events. Among potential events includes a summer concert series, block parties, an international festival, a museum day, etc.

To maximize the benefits and support grant applications, it is important to conduct economic impact studies on local events. These studies will provide valuable data on the events' contributions to the local economy, such as increased tourism, spending in local businesses, and overall community development. This information can help secure funding and demonstrate the positive economic effects of such events, supporting their continued success and growth.

Christmas Carols at the Courthouse
Photo credit: Joe Rogers

It is also recommended to explore partnerships with Hargrave Military Academy and Chatham Hall to maximize the use of community facilities, such as the sharing Hargrave's swimming pool with the public. By collaborating on facility usage, these institutions can enhance resource efficiency, provide additional amenities for residents, and strengthen community ties. This approach allows for more extensive and varied access to recreational facilities and fosters greater cooperation between local organizations. In addition, Hargrave and Chatham Hall may be critical partners for hosting new community events (above) by including their students and faculty in the planning and implementation.

Entrance to Hargrave Military Academy

1.4: Increase access to local goods and produce

Limited access to local goods and produce was a primary concern heard throughout the community engagement process. To help mitigate this, the following strategies can be implemented.

Once such strategy is to build a community garden. A community garden offers numerous benefits, including promoting healthy living through access to fresh produce and physical activity, strengthening community bonds by providing a space for social interaction and cultural exchange, and enhancing the local environment with green spaces and biodiversity. It also provides educational opportunities, teaching gardening, sustainability, and nutrition, while offering economic benefits such as cost savings and stimulating local economies. Additionally, community gardens contribute to mental and emotional well-being by reducing stress and providing a sense of accomplishment.

To start a community garden, a planning committee should be formed with dedicated volunteers who can help with the garden's development. This committee should identify and secure a suitable location, such as vacant lots or park areas, and obtain necessary permissions. Funds can be raised and resources gathered through fundraising and donations. Participants can be recruited through outreach and provided education through workshops. For a successful garden, establish clear rules for garden use and hold regular meetings to address issues and plan activities.

Example of a community garden

Another strategy is to implement a downtown storefront featuring local produce through a co-op model, complemented by a year-round farmer's market. This strategy aims to provide residents and visitors with consistent access to fresh, locally sourced produce while supporting local farmers and businesses. The co-op model promotes community involvement and ownership, enhancing the store's sustainability. A year-round farmer's market further boosts access to seasonal produce, fosters local economic growth, and creates a vibrant community hub.

Case study of a local produce storefront in Boones Mill, VA. Photo credit: Basil's Farm Market & Gifts

To do this, a feasible downtown site or building needs to be identified and an ownership model needs to be developed.

To enhance downtown retail opportunities, it is recommended to encourage businesses to establish a strong online presence and diversify their product offerings. By embracing e-commerce, local retailers can reach a broader customer base and increase sales beyond the physical store. Diversifying products will attract a wider range of customers, meet various needs, and boost overall foot traffic in the downtown area, contributing to a more vibrant and resilient local economy.

1.5: Improve accessibility within Chatham

Accessibility in a small town is crucial for fostering inclusivity, economic vitality, and overall quality of life. When an area is accessible, it ensures that all residents, including those with disabilities, the elderly, and families with young children, can fully participate in community life. This inclusivity strengthens social cohesion, allowing everyone to access public spaces, services, and businesses without barriers.

Multiple community stakeholders shared concerns regarding limited parking options in the downtown core. Parking is a critical component of a downtown area's functionality and appeal, playing a key role in its economic vitality, accessibility, and overall user experience. To expand parking opportunities downtown, a number of steps should be taken:

- Define the boundary of the downtown core
- Inventory the existing parking supply
- Determine demand by surveying existing parking at different times (peak and off-peak hours, weekdays, weekends)
- Identify areas of parking shortage, congestion, and/or enforcement issues
- Evaluate accessibility of parking spaces, including the availability of accessing parking for people with disabilities and the convenience of parking relative to key destinations
- Determine ways to optimize existing parking better
- If needed, identify feasible sites and increase parking supply downtown

Existing parking in front of Post Office

Another key element of community accessibility is connectivity by way of sidewalks. Sidewalks are vital to the functionality and livability of any community. They provide safe, accessible pathways for pedestrians, encouraging walking as a mode of transportation and promoting a healthier lifestyle. Sidewalks also enhance the safety of streets by separating pedestrians from vehicle traffic, reducing the risk of accidents. They play a crucial role in fostering social interaction by connecting neighborhoods and creating spaces where people can meet and engage with one another. Additionally, sidewalks contribute to the economic vitality of an area by improving accessibility to local businesses, making it easier for people to explore and support their local economy. Well-maintained sidewalks also enhance the overall aesthetic of a community, making it more attractive to residents, visitors, and potential investors.

Existing sidewalk in downtown Chatham

Previous efforts to extend existing sidewalks to certain parts of Chatham have been unsuccessful. It is highly recommended to revisit the efforts of extending sidewalks to underserved areas, such as the Sugar Hill neighborhood, to improve pedestrian access and safety.

Limited vehicle access was highlighted as a barrier to accessing various resources in the community. It is recommended to pursue a volunteer-driven community service for transportation to help mitigate this challenge. This initiative can help residents, particularly those with limited mobility, access grocery stores in particular. Potential resources for volunteers include local institutions like Hargrave Military Academy, Chatham Hall, and local churches. The program could be modeled after successful initiatives like the Bedford Ride program, which provides similar transportation services through community volunteer efforts.

Case study of Bedford Ride, a volunteer-driven transportation service. Photo credit: Bedford Ride

Topic Area 2: Community Recreation

High-priority goals for improving Community Recreation in the Chatham area include developing a walkable and bikeable trail system that connects key areas in the community. The creation of outdoor community event spaces is also a focus. Enhancing opportunities and amenities for youth, including a splash pad and encouraging improved childcare services, is a priority, along with promoting active outdoor recreation through a potential new park, upgraded trails for accessibility, and more public amenities. Strengthening partnerships with Chatham Hall and Hargrave Military Academy to utilize their facilities and properties is essential. Additionally, a comprehensive marketing strategy involving a centralized information kiosk or online platform will help keep residents and visitors informed about local amenities and events.

Chatham envisions a seamlessly connected community recreation network that extends walking trails through historic landmarks, highlights natural scenery, and provides accessible amenities for all, with the active involvement of Hargrave Military Academy and Chatham Hall.

Goals Summary:

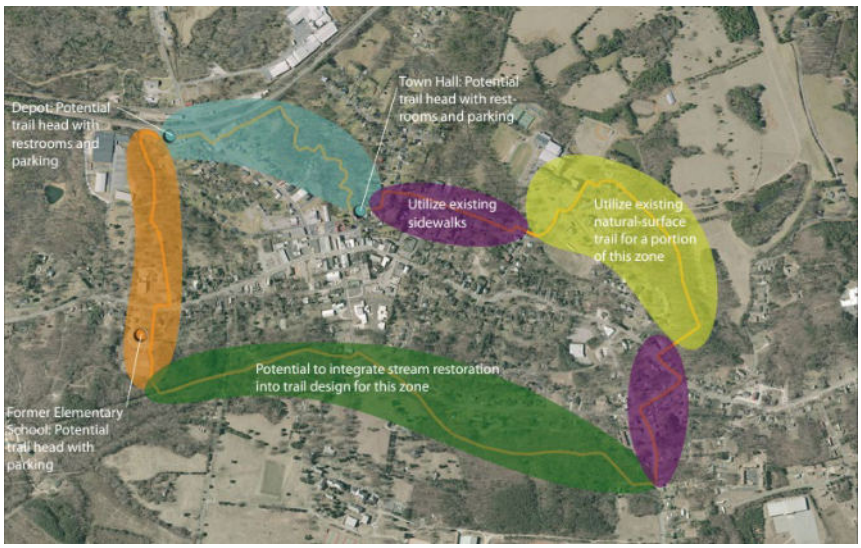
- Pursue opportunities to develop a recreational trail system in Chatham
- Create more outdoor community event spaces
- Encourage active and accessible outdoor recreation
- Increase opportunities and amenities for youth
- Develop a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy
- Strengthen partnerships with Hargrave Military Academy and Chatham Hall

2.1: Pursue opportunities to develop a recreational trail system in Chatham

A common thread throughout public engagement was the desire for more trails in Chatham. A walkable/bikeable recreational trail is essential for promoting physical and mental health, fostering community connectivity, and supporting economic development. It encourages regular exercise, provides an alternative mode of transportation, and creates opportunities for social interaction.

In 2010, Chatham adopted a beautification plan by Virginia Tech, largely implemented except for a proposed 3-mile perimeter walking trail. To build on this success, a planning and design firm should be consulted to develop a trail system study. The first step is to assess the feasibility of developing the proposed trail as-is. Expecting that adjustments will need to be made, the next phase would require the Project Team to recommend improvements to the proposed trail route that consider accessibility and the reduction of private property easements. The plan should utilize existing sidewalks and town property, integrate with the current "Walking Tour" being developed by Chatham First, and consider adding features like signage, exercise stations, and rest areas.

This scope should also explore opportunities to develop a series of interior trail loops that connect with the main trail. In addition, the study should provide a phased construction plan, budget estimates, and a schedule for the feasibility study, design, and construction, with initial segments prioritized for ease of development.


Depot: Potential trail head with restrooms and parking
Town Hall: Potential trail head with rest-rooms and parking
Utilize existing sidewalks
Utilize existing natural-surface trail for a portion of this zone
Potential to integrate stream restoration into trail design for this zone
Former Elementary School: Potential trail head with parking

Trail zones proposed for 'Chatham Visual Enhancements' report. Photo credit: Community Design Assistance Center at Virginia Tech

2.2: Create more outdoor community event spaces

Outdoor community event spaces are important because they serve as gathering points that foster social interaction, community bonding, and cultural expression. These spaces provide a venue for events such as festivals, concerts, and markets, which bring people together, enhancing the sense of community. They also support local economies by attracting visitors and encouraging spending at nearby businesses. Additionally, outdoor event spaces offer residents opportunities to engage in recreational activities and enjoy nature, contributing to their overall well-being and quality of life. By being accessible and inclusive, these spaces help create a vibrant and cohesive community.

It is recommended to conduct an inventory of any existing outdoor event spaces, then determine the feasibility of additional event spaces in the Chatham area. Of particular interest, according to community stakeholders, is an outdoor amphitheater. Community leaders should assess the possibility of an outdoor amphitheater, possibly to be located at Frances Hurt Park.

Case study of an outdoor amphitheater located at Warren G. Lineberry Community Park. Photo credit: Town of Floyd

2.3: Encourage active and accessible outdoor recreation

To enhance active and accessible outdoor recreation in the town, it is recommended to explore the feasibility of establishing a recreation park on the south side of Chatham. In particular there are approximately 17.5 acres owned by the Town of Chatham that may be a possible option for a new public park. To explore this opportunity, a small area plan could be prepared for the site to determine the viability of this site as a recreation amenity. There is also an opportunity to evaluate the feasibility of the undeveloped property behind Harris Field on David Road for development of facilities such as tennis and pickleball courts.

Understanding the community's desire for more recreational amenities, community leaders should consider incorporating additional amenities into public parks and community centers, such as pickleball courts, accessible playgrounds, and tennis courts.

It is also crucial to improve existing trails to accommodate strollers and wheelchairs to make outdoor spaces more inclusive. Lastly, it is advised to increase the number of public benches throughout the town to provide resting spots, encouraging residents and visitors to spend more time outdoors. These recommendations aim to create a more vibrant, accessible, and inclusive environment for the community.

Existing benches downtown, in front of the Courthouse and in Competition Alley

2.4: Increase opportunities and amenities for youth

Recreational amenities for youth are crucial because they provide safe, structured environments for young people to engage in physical activity, social interaction, and personal development. These spaces help promote a healthy lifestyle by encouraging regular exercise, which is essential for physical and mental well-being. Recreational amenities also offer opportunities for socialization, helping youth develop important life skills such as teamwork, communication, and leadership.

In particular, the community may want to consider the establishment of a splash pad to attract families, create a safe activity for young children, and broaden recreational offerings. Frances Hurt Park may be a possible location for a new splash pad.

An aerial of Frances Hurt Park.
Photo credit: Terry Kelley

It is also important to note that during public engagement, we heard numerous concerns about the limited childcare options. Childcare is crucial as it supports working families by enabling parents to balance work and family life while providing early learning and socialization opportunities for children. While childcare is traditionally provided by for-profit service providers, the Town of Chatham and community organizations may be able to encourage childcare service providers to come to Chatham through the following efforts:

- Incentives and support: Offer financial incentives, grants, or tax breaks to new and existing childcare providers.
- Regulatory and zoning adjustments: Simplify licensing and zoning regulations for childcare centers to make it easier for providers to open and operate. Consider establishing designed zones for childcare facilities or offering expedited approval processes.
- Supportive infrastructure: Invest in infrastructure that facilitates the development of childcare services, such as creating shared spaces or facilities that can be adopted for childcare use.

2.5: Develop a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy

To develop a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy for community recreation in Chatham, consider the following recommendations:

- Create a centralized information platform: Develop an online platform or mobile app that serves as a central hub for information on local amenities, events, and recreational opportunities. This platform should be user-friendly and regularly updated with details about parks, trails, sports facilities, and community events.
- Establish a physical information kiosk: Set up a centralized information kiosk in high-traffic areas such as downtown, community centers, or popular parks. This kiosk should provide printed materials, maps, and brochures about recreational facilities and upcoming events. The existing Town of Chatham Welcome Center may be a feasible location for this.

Town of Chatham Welcome Center

- Leverage social media: Utilize social media platforms to promote community recreation activities and engage with residents. Create and maintain active profiles on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to share updates, event announcements, and interactive content.
- Collaborate with local media: Partner with local newspapers, radio stations, and television channels to feature community recreation news, events, and highlights. This collaboration can help reach a broader audience and increase awareness about recreational opportunities.
- Implement targeted outreach: Use targeted marketing techniques to reach different segments of the community. This could include email newsletters, community flyers, and posters in places frequented by families, seniors, and young adults.
- Engage with community groups: Work with local organizations, schools, and businesses to promote recreational activities. These groups can help distribute information and encourage participation through their networks.

2.6: Strengthen partnerships with Hargrave Military Academy and Chatham Hall

To strengthen partnerships with Chatham Hall and Hargrave, it is recommended to leverage their facilities for public use by coordinating with these institutions to open their amenities to the community. This could include using their sports facilities, meeting spaces, or other resources for local events and recreational activities, when appropriate, which would benefit both institutions and the community. Additionally, there is an opportunity to improve marketing efforts for shared facilities to communicate operating hours to the public and promote these facilities and events to enhance visibility and attract more community engagement.

Furthermore, it is advised to utilize the properties of Chatham Hall and Hargrave Military Academy as key components of a potential community trail system. Collaboration with these institutions to incorporate their land into a network of trails can help to connect various parts of the town and provide recreational opportunities for community members, including their student base. These partnerships can also support integrating educational and historical features that highlight the unique attributes of each institution. By working together on these initiatives, both Chatham and each institution can create mutually beneficial opportunities that enhance community connections and recreational access.

An aerial of Chatham Hall (left) and Hargrave Military Academy (right)
Photo credit: Terry Kelley

Topic Area 3: Housing

Chatham's housing goals focus on creating a vibrant, diverse community by addressing a range of needs. Prioritizing housing that attracts young people will help draw a younger demographic to the town. Efforts to address dilapidated lots and vacant homes aim to revitalize the town's appearance and encourage investment. Additionally, it is recommended that Chatham explore options for senior housing and downtown second-floor residential units to diversify housing stock. Increasing the overall housing supply, making the town attractive for developers, and ensuring that new housing is compatible with existing structures are all key strategies to support sustainable growth and preserve Chatham's unique character.

Chatham will support a diverse and vibrant housing landscape that revitalizes vacant lots and homes, promotes mixed-use developments, and offers appealing options for both seniors and young people, including second-floor downtown living.

Goals Summary:

- Prioritize housing that attracts young people
- Address dilapidated lots and vacant homes to encourage investment or sale
- Explore feasible options for senior housing
- Explore options for downtown second-floor housing
- Explore additional opportunities for increasing Chatham’s housing stock
- Make Chatham attractive for developers and builders
- Ensure new housing is compatible with existing housing

3.1: Prioritize housing that attracts young people

While the Town's population declined by 2.9% between 2010 and 2020 census, its population is projected to be stable over the next five years. The median age in Chatham in 2024 is estimated to be 48.8 according to Claritas and 42% of the population is age 55+ with 28% being 55-74. As such, there is a need to attract younger people to Chatham to ensure its long vitality and sustainability. Young residents bring energy, creativity, and new ideas that can stimulate local economies and foster innovation. They are often key drivers of economic growth, supporting local businesses, and filling jobs in emerging industries. Additionally, a younger population can help balance the age demographics of a community, ensuring a more dynamic and diverse population mix.

To attract young people to Chatham, it is essential to prioritize the development of housing options that meet their needs and preferences. This includes focusing on townhomes and luxury apartments, which offer modern amenities, convenience, and a low-maintenance lifestyle that appeals to younger residents. These types of housing provide a more urban living experience within a small-town setting, making Chatham an attractive option for young professionals, couples, and small families.

Example of a townhome housing development that is architecturally unique

In addition to market-rate housing, the town should investigate funding opportunities for affordable and workforce housing initiatives. Ensuring that there are affordable options available will broaden the appeal of Chatham to a wider range of young people, including those just starting their careers or working in essential services. By balancing luxury and affordability, Chatham can create a diverse and vibrant community that supports economic growth and sustainability.

3.2: Address dilapidated lots and vacant homes to encourage investment or sale

A top concern from community stakeholders was the large number of vacant homes and dilapidated lots in the Chatham area. To determine the extent of vacant homes, the Town should pursue a Virginia Housing planning study to conduct a housing needs assessment. To address dilapidated lots and vacant homes in Chatham, community leaders could initiate a coordinated cleaning effort to improve the appearance and safety of these properties. Organizing community clean-up events and working with property owners to maintain their lots can significantly enhance the town's overall aesthetic and make these areas more attractive for potential investors or buyers. A cleaner, well-maintained environment fosters a sense of pride and encourages further investment in the community.

Case study: "Project BAUD" in Marion Virginia. Project BAUD (Blighted, Abandoned, Underutilized, and Derelict) takes a systematic approach to comprehensively address areas in the community where improvements to buildings and sites can provide huge benefits to the community.

Additionally, the Town should consider implementing an uninhabited building tax as a way to motivate property owners to either rehabilitate or sell their vacant homes. This tax would serve as an incentive for owners to take action on their neglected properties, thereby reducing the number of unused and decaying structures in Chatham. By discouraging long-term vacancy, the town can create opportunities for new development and revitalization. There may be additional opportunities to review and amend ordinances to address challenges of individuals utilizing buildings as residents that were intended for other purposes.

It is advised for the Town to enforce certificates of occupancy requirements as another crucial step to support this goal. Ensuring that buildings meet safety and habitability standards before they can be occupied will prevent the deterioration of properties and protect future residents. Strict enforcement of these regulations can also encourage owners of vacant or dilapidated homes to either invest in necessary repairs or sell the properties to those who will, contributing to the town's overall growth and improvement.

A residence in the Town of Chatham

3.3: Explore feasible options for senior housing

Senior housing is crucial for several reasons. It provides a safe, supportive environment tailored to the unique needs of older adults, ensuring they can live independently with access to necessary services and amenities. As the population ages, the demand for age-appropriate housing increases, making it essential for communities to offer options that cater to this demographic.

In addition, senior housing helps keep older adults integrated within the community, allowing them to remain close to family, friends, and familiar surroundings. This contributes to their overall well-being and reduces the risk of social isolation. Offering senior housing options also frees up larger homes for younger families, helping to balance the housing market and support generational continuity within the town.

One promising approach is to encourage the development of patio homes, which are single-level, low-maintenance residences that offer a comfortable and accessible living environment for older adults. These homes provide an ideal balance of independence and convenience, with features like open floor plans, minimal stairs, and outdoor spaces designed for easy upkeep. By focusing on patio homes and other senior-friendly housing options, Chatham can ensure that its older residents have suitable, attractive places to live while remaining connected to the community.

Example of single-level patio home that may be especially appropriate for seniors

3.4: Explore options for downtown second-floor housing

Second-floor housing in a downtown area offers several benefits:

- Increased Housing Supply: By utilizing existing buildings, second-floor housing adds more residential units without requiring additional land, helping to address housing shortages and meet demand.
- Revitalization of Downtown: Residential units above commercial spaces can increase foot traffic and activity in downtown areas, supporting local businesses and contributing to a vibrant, lively environment.
- Efficient Use of Space: Second-floor housing optimizes the use of existing structures, making the most of available space in densely built urban areas.
- Enhanced Economic Activity: Residents living in downtown areas are likely to shop at local stores, dine at nearby restaurants, and use local services, boosting the local economy.
- Reduced Commute and Traffic: Living close to work and amenities can reduce the need for commuting, leading to lower traffic congestion and reduced carbon emissions.
- Improved Safety and Security: Increased residential presence in downtown areas can enhance safety by ensuring more eyes on the street and a greater sense of community vigilance.

This goal encourages the Town of Chatham or a non-profit housing provider to pursue a Virginia Housing planning grant to fund a feasibility study, which will assess the practicality and benefits of converting or developing second-floor residential units in downtown Chatham. The study will help determine the viability of such projects, identify potential challenges, and provide insights into how this approach can contribute to increasing downtown housing while revitalizing the area. This goal will also require the Town of a non-profit housing provider to engage with downtown property owners to assess possible opportunities for second-floor housing.

3.5: Explore additional opportunities for increasing Chatham's housing stock

Similar to other historic small towns, Chatham has an older housing stock with just 16% of housing units built in the past 34 years. The community shared a distinct desire to have more housing opportunities, particularly new construction. To increase Chatham's housing stock, it is essential to explore several strategic initiatives.

The Town of Chatham's housing stock is 85% single-family detached, and 12% is multi-family. The community should encourage the development of mixed-use housing projects as a means to enhance both residential options and local economic activity. By integrating residential units with commercial spaces, such developments can attract more residents, support local businesses, and create vibrant, walkable communities. Mixed-use projects not only provide more housing but also contribute to a lively, active town center that can drive further investment.

It is also crucial to identify opportunity sites for expanding Chatham's housing stock. Conducting thorough analyses to pinpoint underutilized or available properties can help prioritize areas for development. By targeting these opportunity sites, the community can effectively increase its housing inventory, meet the growing demand, and stimulate overall community growth.

One key initiative is to explore the feasibility of extending Peach Street to Route 57, which could open up new areas for residential development and improve connectivity within the town. This infrastructure improvement can make previously underutilized or inaccessible areas more viable for housing projects.

3.6: Make Chatham attractive for developers and builders

To make the Chatham area attractive for residential developers and builders, the Town should first explore and implement financial incentives for residential developers. This could include tax breaks, grants, or subsidies to reduce the financial burden of new projects, making it more appealing for developers to invest in Chatham. Additionally, streamlining the permitting process and providing support for infrastructure improvements can further enhance the town's appeal to potential builders.

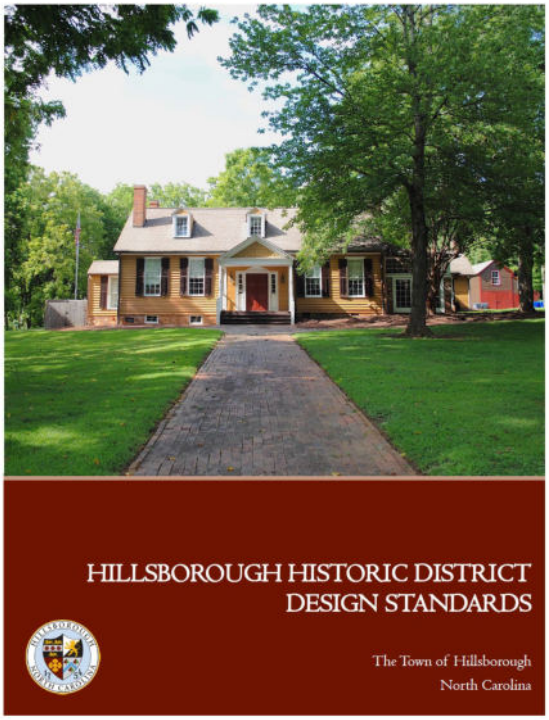
Furthermore, Chatham should develop a strategy to leverage broadband internet as a key attractor for remote workers. By ensuring high-speed internet access is widely available and promoting it as a significant advantage, Chatham can attract professionals who are increasingly seeking remote work opportunities in desirable locations. Highlighting the town's connectivity and work-life balance advantages can make it an appealing destination for remote workers and their families, further stimulating local development and growth.

Chatham Lofts, a 31-unit apartment building that was a renovation of a 1920's school.

3.7: Ensure new housing is compatible with existing housing

One concern from the community regarding newly constructed homes is the compatibility of new homes with the existing housing stock in Chatham, which is full of historic, architecturally unique character.

To ensure that new housing developments in Chatham are compatible with existing structures, it is advised to consider implementing design guidelines that align new projects with the character and aesthetic of existing homes. Developing these guidelines will help maintain architectural harmony, preserving the visual and historical integrity of the community while accommodating growth.



Case study of design guidelines for the Hillsborough Historic District in NC. These guidelines were prepared by Hill Studio.

Additionally, community leaders should investigate the feasibility of creating a residential plans library that could offer pre-approved, community-compatible house designs for developers and homeowners. This resource would streamline the approval process and provide options that align with local design standards, making it easier for new housing to blend seamlessly with existing homes and enhancing overall neighborhood cohesion.

There may also be an opportunity to support homeowners in navigating residential historic tax credit applications to further promote compatibility and preservation of their homes. A potential option is to facilitate a grant through Chatham First or another community organization to help with homeowner support.

Topic Area 4: Small Business & Economic Development

Small business support and economic development is key to the growth and renewal of the Chatham community. This plan is a market-based study, and the market analysis presented in a previous chapter identifies a number of specific and quantifiable business opportunities that could lead to growing existing business, while recruiting needed new business. The opportunities it shows should not be seen as potential competition for current businesses, but rather growing the critical mass of business in the community that will create more well-rounded offerings to meet the needs of the local market, increase customer traffic, and otherwise solidify and grow the market for all businesses.

Of course, small business and economic development does not begin and end with identifying gaps in the market and growing and recruiting businesses. This section also presents goals and strategies for how Chatham can reach new markets, how it should promote itself to expand customer base and recruit new investment, and perhaps most importantly, creating a sustainable organizational structure to accomplish the goals in this plan.

Chatham envisions a thriving small business community driven by local entrepreneurs, with niche markets and student-friendly offerings that attract a steady flow of walk-in clientele, ensuring long-term success.

Goals Summary:

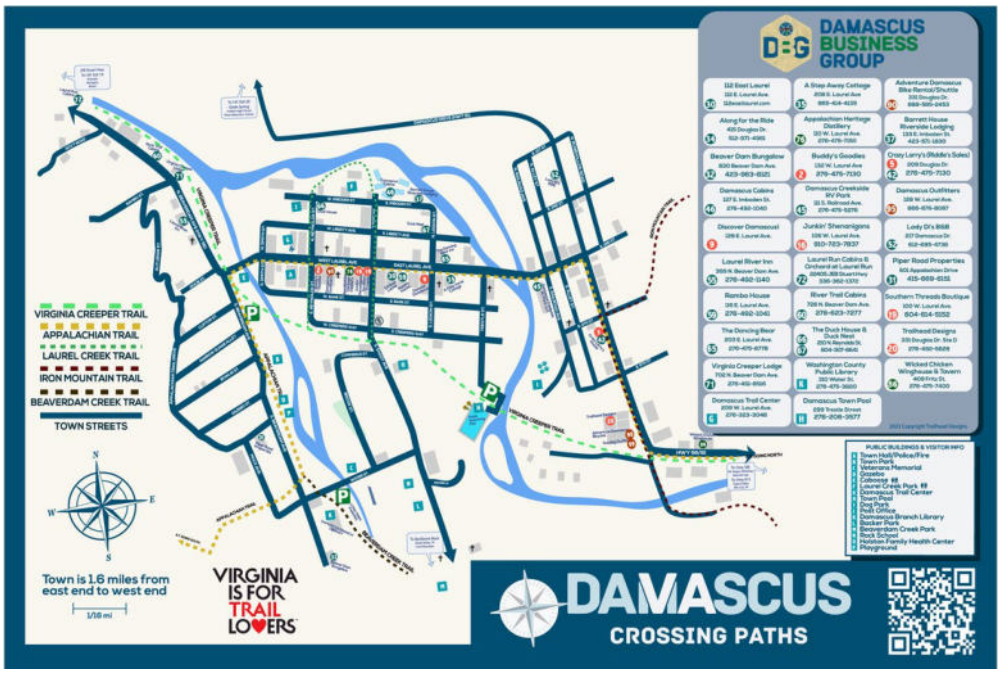
- Increase access to local goods and fresh produce
- Develop a strategy to attract diverse restaurants and businesses to the community
- Market Chatham to local and broad markets
- Tell Chatham's unique story
- Create model for downtown revitalization

4.1: Create Model for Downtown Revitalization

With the Town of Chatham, as well as its active partners of Chatham First, Chatham Rotary Foundation, and others, the small town of Chatham has perhaps one of the most robust visioning and planning efforts of any small town in Virginia. Still, these groups are run by generally the same group of individuals who have limited time and are stretched thin. On top of that, regional business development organizations like the Chamber are really pulled more towards the Danville area. While the visioning of the community including the Reimagine Chatham continues, local partners should consider an entity that is solely focused on business development.

There are a number of models to do this, and the best model for Chatham will simply be what works best for the business community of Chatham. In other words, it's not a one-sized-fits-all solution. Key models include:

- Merchant's Association – These entities can often be somewhat informal in structure, but can provide a valuable voice for independent businesses in community discussions and decision making. They also can be successful in cooperative marketing and promotion. The Damascus Business Group has facilitated numerous marketing tools including a branded map for the local businesses.



Local Business Map. Photo credit: Damascus Business Group

- Private Non-Profit Community Group – This would be a more formalized, 501 c3 version of a business association. Frankly, the best example of this in Virginia is Chatham First, but that organization has its own vision and purpose and should continue on its path for community focused projects like Reimagine Chatham. Furthermore, this entity suggested here would need to be led by the small business community.

- Exploring Main Street – Main Street is a tried-and-true national initiative for downtown revitalization. Virginia, like most states, has a department level Main Street program within the DHCD division. Virginia Main Street (VMS) offers robust programming and technical assistance to 97 communities in three tiers across the state. The initial tier, Exploring Main Street, is open to all communities in the state (incorporated & unincorporated). These communities are considering evolving to a more formal downtown revitalization entity, and simply must apply. EMS communities can apply for certain VMS grants focused on organization, place making, façade programs, etc. They are typically initiated by the local government. The closest EMS community to Chatham is Halifax.

- Mobilizing or Advancing Main Street – These two are the more formalized and graduated tiers of the VMS program. They include communities that have illustrated organizational capacity including an existing 501 c3. They have an organizational committee and local government support and financial commitment to Main Street as an economic development strategy. Both tiers are eligible for advanced grants and technical assistance from VMS. Mobilizing Main Street has a two-year commitment with the goal of achieving Advancing Main Street status. Some of Virginia's most successful downtowns are Advancing Main Street Communities. Both Danville River District and Lynchburg are Advancing Main Street, but also nearby smaller communities of Altavista and South Boston.

Regardless of model, we do recognize the real potential in Chatham of diluting the volunteer pool in a community that has big vision, but limited population. Early efforts for downtown revitalization and planning should focus on mobilization and capacity building with the end goal of a dedicated downtown entity. A focused downtown organization will be the conduit to increase awareness and access to resources for business planning, but also lead the community's effort to promote Chatham as a destination and bring more business to its small businesses.

Quite often, these entities start out as a focused community group, and then graduate to a focused downtown development organization. St Paul Tomorrow is perhaps the best example of this in the state. Like Chatham First, this group began as a community-wide visioning committee, that gained support and partnership with the Town and business community, and today is a fully accredited Main Street program. Without the energy and support of this group, the successes they have seen with developing the Western Front Hotel, fully renovating and programming the Lyric Theater, and playing a leadership role in organizing the Clinch River State Park, a blue water state park that stretches from St Paul to its headwaters in Tazewell.

Every downtown organization is different, and the right model for Chatham is what will work best for Chatham. By the same token, Chatham can learn from each of these places, and should organize discovery visits to a few other communities that have seen success. Preferably, it would be a community with a dedicated business development group that has also completed a project or two similar to what is called for in this plan. These groups have worked hard to revitalize their downtowns and are always happy to share their success with others. Representatives from Town leadership, Reimagine Chatham initiative, and the local business community can be a part of these visits where discussions can be about the organization, its background, challenges they have faced along the way, and successful projects. Most of these communities have been mentioned previously in this report, but could include:

- St Paul – St Paul Tomorrow began as a similar organization as the Rotary Foundation and Reimagine Chatham with local leaders and stakeholders leading key projects that improve the community. Eventually, the group evolved into being St Paul Main Street, fully dedicated to downtown revitalization and the smallest Main Street community in the State with just 844 residents. Key project to discuss: Western Front Hotel.
- Lynchburg – Lynchburg of course is much bigger than Chatham but is the largest Main Street community in the State, and has a robust organizational model. Most importantly, Downtown Lynchburg Association has a collaborative partnership with the City of Lynchburg and collectively implement downtown projects. Key project to discuss: Lynchburg Community Market.
- Staunton – Staunton Downtown Development Association is one of the oldest downtown revitalization groups in Virginia and has seen tremendous success in tourism development and promotion, as well as business recruitment. Key project to discuss: Unified brand and marketing strategy.

- Bedford – The Town of Bedford is unique for a small town in it has a dedicated economic development position within the municipal government. While this person conducts economic development town-wide, much of that is focused on downtown proper. The community has been successful in recruiting developers to create an adaptive reuse of former warehouse as market-rate apartments, a destination brewery, and are currently working to develop an anchor mixed-use project with a boutique hotel, apartments, and restaurant. Key project to discuss: Bedford gateway project
- Damascus – This small town of under 800 residents has a vast number of destinations drawing outsiders to the community including the Damascus Trail Center, signature events, the Virginia Creeper and AT trails, a boutique hotel, a local brewery, distillery, etc. As successful as the town is, its activity is incredibly seasonal, and local businesses can struggle during the winter and early spring. The Damascus Business Group (DBG) was formed by local business owners to be a unified voice with the Town and local partners, while also cooperatively marketing small businesses. Key project to discuss: Structure and function of the fully-independent DBG organization.
- Nearby downtown groups – Short trips to nearby downtown focused agencies could also include Altavista On Track, Destination Downtown South Boston, Clarksville, Farmville Downtown Partnership, etc. Each of these have private non-profit or municipal-led downtown groups and have completed or are working on an array of catalyst projects including renovation of a historic theater, boutique hotel, outdoor recreation development, marketing, and downtown planning.

Once a business model has been created, the next step will be to clearly define roles in a partnership of the Town, Reimagine Chatham, and the downtown business organization. In communities like Chatham, downtown revitalization cannot be achieved by the local government alone. It also cannot be achieved solely by a nonprofit like Reimagine Chatham. Successful downtowns have a unified vision, full partnership in both implementation and participation of the public and private sectors, support from the business community, and leveraging partner resources. This Growth and Renewal Plan is a result of those partnerships that continue to be cultivated in Chatham. This plan, and its strategy board lay out key tasks and potential lead partners to accomplish each task. It is recommended that the first implementation task be an implementation workshop with the Town, Reimagine Chatham, and any other high-level partners, to discuss roles and amend the strategy board as needed. When the downtown business organization is ultimately created, a number of the strategies of this plan could be incorporated directly into their work plan.

4.2: Increase access to local goods and fresh produce

A common theme during the discussions with stakeholders and the community was the lack of goods and services to support the needs of local residents. In particular, the closing of the Old Dutch Supermarket in early 2020 was cited as creating a void in needed grocery options, particularly in the North Main area of downtown where transportation challenges have created a food desert. Similarly, the Tightsqueeze commercial area just to the south of town has significant commercial offerings including conventional grocery, general merchandising, restaurants, convenience, drugstore, and various services. Some of these offerings, particularly grocery and drug store, are the only location of that particular good in the Chatham market.

The market analysis in a previous chapter shows a conservative estimate that the Chatham trade area could support up to 57,846 square feet of new retail and goods. This is based on a limited capture of demand within the 20-minute drive time trade area, and the opportunity is likely greater. By the same token, we also know from the market study that Chatham, Pittsylvania County, and the entire Danville metro has seen a slight decline in population over the past couple of decades. While the market shows a contraction, it also shows that this population is stabilizing, and the data suggests that retail demand trending upward.

One key area of opportunity is in grocery stores. However, there currently is not enough demand for another conventional store like Food Lion, or the Old Dutch Market, which could have been a a reason for the latter store's closing. Still there is demand for up to 2,626 square feet of food and beverage, which includes grocery, meat and fish, fresh vegetables, etc. Chatham should consider promoting this opportunity to recruit a small independent grocer or fresh foods market in the North Main area. A similar product would be Matthews Fruit Stand in Lake City, a small community in rural South Carolina. Matthews has occupied this corner for more than five decades, providing fresh produce, fruit and groceries to the residents of Lake City, including adjacent lower-income neighborhoods

Matthews Fruit Stand in Lake City, SC
Photo credit: Google Street View

and residents. Other examples include the Heritage Family Market in Fincastle VA and Yoder's Market in Crewe VA, both of which are successful small town grocers owned and operated by local German Baptists families.

Interior of Lynchburg Community Market

Chatham should also look to recruit new businesses and encourage expansion of existing businesses based off the market research. Key opportunities included general mercantile, family and women's clothing, furniture and home furnishings, as well as a number of specialty categories. Some of these categories show demand for a new store, while others show more limited opportunity that may suggest expansion. The community could also consider developing a "midtown market" in downtown, a unique emporium type destination with small spaces for niche businesses, craft, growers, etc. This could be a stand alone, year-round establishment like the Community Market in downtown Lynchburg, or it could begin as a weekly or monthly market like the Friends and Farmers Market held each week inside at the Norton VA Expo Center. The community should also consider exploring other cooperative business models for utilizing large retai spaces in Chatham.

Recruitment will not happen over night, but the community can begin by sharing this market research with existing and potential businesses owners, as well as developers and property owners. It should also be actively distributed to real estate professionals and economic development partners. The town can also work with these partners to identify key sites to house potential businesses, and engage with the property owners to build a plan for its development. Considering incentives for new or expanding businesses would also help recruit new investment. Finally, Chatham should consider establishing an enterprise zone in the community. Enterprise zones encourage jobs and private investment, and provide state and local incentives to employers that create jobs or invest in real property. There are three enterprise zones in the county, include one that covers portions of the Chatham area such as ODAC, the industrial park off of Chalk Level Road, and Hargrave property. Chatham should review the boundaries of the existing enterprise zone to see if they need to be expanded and explore opportunities for enterprise zones to be aligned with historic districts.

4.3: Develop a strategy to attract diverse restaurants and destination businesses

Community engagement and market research also identified the need for growing businesses that not only fill needed gaps, but also can support a visitor market as well as pass-through traffic along Highway 29. This strategic plan calls for growing recreational and other local amenities, targeted physical improvements, and marketing of the community. Many of these will increase Chatham's potential as a destination, and there will be a need for businesses that can cater to that activity.

This begins with recruiting restaurant offerings based on demand. The market study showed conservative demand for 10,655 square feet of restaurant space, with the majority of that demand being in the "full-service" category (as opposed to fast food). A typical independent restaurant can be anywhere from 2,500 to 5,000 square feet, so this market demand suggests opportunity for another two to four restaurants. This can be key not only to meet local needs, but also to support potential visitor traffic. Community engagement suggested the potential for a restaurant serving breakfast, which can often be successful in a courthouse town like Chatham. There was also mention of a brewery or place to socialize, and an ice cream shop that may cater to students at Chatham High, Chatham Hall, and Hargrave. The market research shows opportunity for each of these, including "drinking places" which shows over $1.6 million in annual demand. This category includes brewery type businesses, similar to Big Cherry Brewing Company in Big Stone Gap, VA, or the small Damascus Brewery in Damascus. Damascus, a town of under 800 residents, even has a craft distillery in town.

Damascus Brewery in Damascus, VA

Recruiting niche businesses like mentioned in the previous section (shoes, gifts, antiques, books, jewelry, etc) would meet demand in the local market while also catering to visitors. Businesses like Shadetree Rare Books or Farmhouse Butchery are excellent local examples.

Creating a strong business support and education process to ensure new businesses have a viable work plan and support to succeed in town is critical. This should begin with encouraging property owners to verify the business acumen of their potential before leasing. Other strategies would be working with the Danville Area Chamber, Longwood SBDC in Danville, or Lynchburg Regional SBDC. For example, Botetourt County works with the Roanoke Regional SBDC to hold an annual small business summit that connects small businesses with resources for marketing, business planning, merchandising, and finance, among others. It also offers its "Open for Business" checklist for small businesses.

YES, WE'RE OPEN
THE CHECKLIST
1 CREATE A FEASIBLE BUSINESS CONCEPT
Identify who will buy your service or product.
Research similar businesses and consider their models.
Understand the role of demographics and local economic data in business planning.
Determine market opportunity. Ask yourself, "Is there truly a market for my business?"
Consider how you will fund start-up costs.
2 DEVELOP A THOROUGH BUSINESS PLAN
Make realistic financial projections for start-up, overhead, and upkeep costs before taking in revenue.
Prepare a cash flow projection.
Determine feasible price ranges for your products or services, accounting for sales and use tax or meals tax as relevant.
Determine your financial record-keeping method. Do you want to hire a bookkeeper or do it yourself?
Identify the most effective marketing strategies to build awareness and generate leads.
Research insurance options and requirements.
Develop a plan to show customer appreciation.
Identity business tax requirements.
3 IDENTIFY LEGAL STRUCTURE
Apply for a business license with the Commissioner of the Revenue and the State Corporation Commission. Ask whether you will need any other professional licenses to operate legally.
Decide which business structure is best for you (Sole proprietor, LLC, partnership, or corporation). Consider state and federal tax liability with a legal or tax professional.
Consider whether any socio-economic certification programs (SWAM, 8(a), microbusiness, veteran, etc.) will be beneficial.
4 PLAN FOR EMPLOYEE HIRING AND TRAINING
Ensure staffing needs will be met for your planned hours of operation.
Learn all state and federal labor laws, and formulate a compliance plan.
Develop a plan to file payroll taxes accurately and on time. Seek assistance if necessary.
Identify training resources that will help prepare your employees to provide great customer service.
5 DETERMINE THE BEST BUSINESS LOCATION
Identify your need for space. Consider how much space your competitors use, amount of foot traffic, cost per square foot, and market demographics in your location decision.
Contact the Department of Community Development to determine if your business can operate at your desired location.
Negotiate a lease or purchase of commercial space. Determine the cost of upgrades needed to make your location site code compliant to obtain a CO and appropriate zoning.
Determine value of road frontage and visibility for your business. Apply for a sign permit.
6 REVIEW AND ADJUST THE BUSINESS PLAN
Adjust financial projections as you learn more about your business and your industry best practices.
Acquire all necessary permits and licenses before opening for business.
Consider seasonality. Adjust cash flow projections accordingly and select optimal start date.
Ask subject matter experts for feedback on your business plan.
Review trusted capital sources such as grants, loans, competitions, and local incentive programs.
If needed, discuss the process of procuring a loan with multiple lenders. Carefully weigh options.
Register for necessary taxes.
7 PRIME YOUR BUSINESS FOR OPENING DAY
Determine marketing plan for grand opening.
Think through the details of your opening-day operations—prepare yourself and your staff.
Schedule a ribbon cutting with the local chamber and ask for their help alerting the local media.
Reach out to your target market and any relevant niche communities to let them know you are "Open for Business!"

Botetourt County "Open for Business" small business checklist
Photo credit: Botetourt County Economic Development

Other communities have found success in working with their business support partners to facilitate small business educational programming and business planning processes. For example, The Gauntlet run by The Advancement Foundation is the largest business program and competition in Virginia. Similarly, the Community Business Launch grant and education program from DHCD offers a significant grant program to communities small and large across the Commonwealth. Most recently, this included small towns like Blackstone, Norton, Buena Vista, Big Stone Gap, and Scottsville. With just 530 residents, Scottsville is one of the smallest communities that have facilitated a CBL program.

4.4: Market Chatham both locally and beyond

One of the biggest challenges to Chatham businesses is being able to grow its market. The community has both advantages and disadvantages to market growth. As a county seat with a major highway delivering people to and through Chatham, the community has the benefit of access as it serves a large rural population that includes much of the 60,000 residents of Pittsylvania County. Similarly, it exists in a rural region that includes Virginia and nearby North Carolina, and its local businesses, farmers markets, and events see activity and commerce from both states. It also has a major activity generator in ODAC which brings in people from all over Virginia and beyond to its events, conference facilities, and shows. By the same token, Chatham is impacted by Danville, and to a lesser degree Lynchburg – two urban communities with a strong gravitational pull that attracts residents, employers, and businesses to these larger places.

In order to have success and growing and developing the business community, Chatham must find ways to capitalize on its regional position, while also focusing on internal growth by collaborating with its destinations like ODAC, Chatham Hall and Hargrave, to jointly market the community to the outside, while finding ways to connect to these destination's markets while they are here in the community. Continuing to engage with Chatham Hall and Hargrave, to understand opportunities for partnership, but also identifying those businesses needed by their students and faculty such as ice cream, coffee shop, etc. In addition, other communities have found success in programming welcome back and homecoming events for these institutions, which are strategically programmed to highlight those local businesses that may be relevant to that market. Another way to connect these schools to the business market in a positive and community-building way, would be to encourage local businesses to offer paid internships to students perhaps aimed at business planning marketing assistance, social media management, among others.

Finally, there is the real need for Chatham to increase lodging opportunities in town. This can begin by encouraging local property owners to consider short term lodging listings. This can be a great opportunity to make significant money as a homeowner or business owner. There are currently just five properties listed on Airbnb and Vrbo in the immediate Chatham area. Chatham is in the "Altavista" submarket, which has a submarket score of 8 for the overall market (Source: AirDna) but a score of 62 for investability. The lower submarket score likely is due to

the limited overall product and lack of data, as the adjacent markets of South Boston, Henry County and Danville are much higher. Regardless, this is a great way to build product to meet lodging demand, while still exploring more conventional options.

A recent Focused Feasibility Study led by Chatham First was published in December of 2021. That study was assessing a specific site adjacent to ODAC. The study concluded that with the primary demand generators of ODAC, Chatham Hall, and Hargrave, that Chatham could potentially support an upper-midscale product such as a Fairfield Inn or similar product. It provided a feasibility study for a 90-room hotel with boardroom, pantry and complimentary breakfast. It would be supported in part by the 100,000 visitors that come to ODAC each year including its indoor arena and conference center. With a projected 69.4% occupancy rate and $135 average daily rate, the study suggested that such a product may be feasible. However, in the three years since, the hotel discussion has not moved forward.

While the community and its partners should continue its efforts to recruit a conventional product, it can also consider the development of a smaller, boutique-style hotel product. These properties have had tremendous success throughout Virginia, in communities both large and small. Usually around 20-30 rooms on average, they can not only fill demand not currently met with overall lodging, but also provide an experience that fully connects with the overall character and activity of the community. For example, the Western Front Hotel in St Paul, VA (population 844) offers 30 rooms geared towards the outdoor enthusiast. The hotel is the result of ongoing visioning of the town and its regional partners, the continued development of outdoor recreation product, and the successful recruitment of a boutique hotel developer. The $7.8 million project included private investment from the developer, along with funding stacking from St Paul, Wise County, state and federal preservation tax credits, and grants from DHCD, ARC, VTC and Tobacco Commission. The hotel has become the single most economic catalyst for the town.

Interior Lobby of Western Front Hotel

4.5: Tell Chatham's Unique Story

This section has presented goals and strategies aimed to recruit new business and investment, grow and support existing businesses, and identify ways to tap into the captive markets driven by our regional position and local activity generators. Often when a community first thinks about marketing itself, it focuses on an external marketing message. Why would a visitor want to come or how can we convince a new business to invest? Some also ask, why is our community a great place to live and raise a family and how can we better connect with the locals who call our community home? When marketing a community, this should never be an either/or question. In fact, whenever we think about why we love our hometown, why people may want to come and visit our community, or why a new business may want to come and open shop, the common thread that binds all of this together and is most important to messaging, is the character of place. That unique story and what makes Chatham special, should be part of a unified effort to market the community including its destinations, its businesses, and its events.

Bedford Virginia is a great example of a community that leverages its unique character to tell a broad story about what makes it a unique place. Like Norton in the community amenities strategies above, Bedford began by creating a community and downtown brand system, followed by creating a marketing plan for its downtown and local businesses. That marketing plan, messaging and creative style all are anchored in Bedford's unique story to tell. It's the "Bedford Boys" story with the town having more causalities per capita than any other locality in the country. It's the National D-Day Memorial that brings in over 60,000 visitors each year. It's the connection to our founding father Thomas Jefferson, and his vision of independence. In Bedford, the story is about uncommon patriotism and sacrifice. That message and style is the foundation of any marketing effort the town does, from event marketing, to promotion of local businesses, to recruitment of new business.

Marketing Plan Graphics in Bedford

Chatham should consider developing its own branding and marketing plan that highlights its unique story. While a separate process, this Reimagine Chatham Growth and Renewal Plan has already laid the foundation to craft that story. Locals and future residents will appreciate the safety of the community and the quaintness of this small town. The architecture of downtown, adjacent neighborhoods, and learning institutions are second to none. There is the need and opportunity to promote the history of Gilbert and Sugar Hill, as well as other African American neighborhoods, businesses, local advocates and community champions.

This plan should also identify funding through grants from VTC or VDOT for blue signage on Highway 29 promoting local businesses, or improvements to gateway signage, landscaping and bannering discussed in the community identity section. It should also incorporate strategies mentioned in the recreation section to connect residents to recreational assets and events. Simply put, it should be specific in messaging, comprehensive in its strategy, and consistent in the tools it uses to tell Chatham's story!

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY BOARD

The Implementation Strategy Board matrix is a blueprint document that outlines key goals and strategies for the Chatham Area Growth and Renewal Plan. Recognizing that no single entity can or should manage the entire workload alone, the matrix also assigns roles and responsibilities for each task.

This matrix is designed to be a flexible tool for ongoing evaluation and benchmarking throughout the implementation process. Recommendations within the Strategy Board are not fixed and can be adjusted or removed as necessary. As the plan advances, priorities may shift, and new ones may emerge.

The Implementation Strategy Board is organized by the plan's four topic areas and includes:

- *Strategy*: A brief statement summarizing each initiative in alignment with the strategies detailed in the main report.
- *Priority*: Actions are prioritized based on when they should begin within the plan's 10-year horizon, rather than when they will be completed.
    - Short-Term: Initiatives that should start within the first 1-2 years.
    - Medium-Term: Projects slated to begin in years 2-5, covering both advanced initiatives and those continuing from the short-term phase.
    - Long-Term: Projects that may be more complex or dependent on future developments, expected to start around year 5.
- *Partners:* Identifies all entities involved in each task.
    - Lead: The primary agency or agencies responsible for task completion.
    - Partner Agencies: Additional entities likely to support the task's implementation.

Community Amenities				
	Priority	Lead	Partners	Notes
1.1 Expand community identity and create a shared vision for Chatham				
Develop gateways to Chatham	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County, Rotary Foundation	Possibly pursue DHCD implementation grant following DHCD Business District Revitalization Grant
Create a community and downtown brand	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County, Rotary Foundation	Fee estimate: $17,000 - $22,000 (in conjunction with goal 4.4)
Pursue a DHCD Business District Revitalization Grant	Short	Town of Chatham	PDC	Up to $100,000 (grant funded)
Update the Town's Comprehensive Plan	Long	Town of Chatham	PDC	Can hire a consultant or do in-house
Expand historic district or identify new ones	Short	Town of Chatham or Chatham Rotary Foundation	Pittsylvania Historical Society	PIF needs to be completed first. Cost of expansion/new district(s) dependent on number of buildings. Explore options for cost-sharing.
Leverage Chatham's strong community engagement	Medium	Chatham First	Rotary Foundation, Hargrave, Chatham Hall	
Engage with the African American Community	Medium	Chatham First	NAACP, Rotary Foundation	
1.2 Determine Chatham's tourism draw				
Explore and develop products that support tourism	Medium	Chatham Rotary Foundation	Chatham First, Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County Economic Development	
Explore lodging options for visitors	Medium	Town of Chatham, Private developer, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Chatham First, Pittsylvania County Economic Development	
1.3 Create community gathering spaces and events				
Incorporate sitting areas throughout the community	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs.	Possibly funded through private donations
Promote the library's services and role as a community meeting place	Medium	Pittsylvania County	Town of Chatham, Chatham First	
Host more community events	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., Hargrave, Chatham Hall	

Explore partnerships with Hargrave and Chatham Hall	Short	Chatham First, Town of Chatham	Hargrave, Chatham Hall, Rotary Foundation, Pittsylvania County	
1.4 Increase access to local goods and produce				
Build a community garden	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., Hargrave, Chatham Hall	In-kind donations
Implement a downtown storefront featuring local goods and produce	Short	Chatham Rotary Foundation, Private Developer	Property owners	Dependent on building ownership situation, may be eligible for DHCD funding for feasibility studies and possibly construction
Encourage businesses to establish a strong online presence and diversify offerings	Medium	Chatham Rotary Foundation	Business owners, Pittsylvania County	
1.5 Improve accessibility with Chatham				
Expand parking opportunities downtown	Long	Town of Chatham	Chatham Rotary Foundation	
Revisit efforts of extending sidewalks to underserved areas	Long	Town of Chatham	Chatham First	
Pursue a volunteer-driven community service for transportation	Medium	Chatham First	Hargrave, Chatham Hall, local churches, Rotary Foundation, Pittsylvania County	
Community Recreation				
	Priority	Lead	Partners	Notes
2.1 Pursue opportunities to develop a recreational trail system in Chatham				
Develop a trail system study	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec, property owners	Cost estimate currently being prepared by Hill Studio
Assess the feasibility of developing the proposed trail	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec, property owners	
Recommend improvements to the proposed trail	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec, property owners	
Explore opportunities to develop a series of interior trail loops that connect with the main trail	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec, property owners	
2.2 Create more outdoor community event spaces				
Determine the feasibility of additional event spaces	Short	Town of Chatham	Chatham First	
Assess the possibility of an outdoor amphitheater	Medium	Town of Chatham	Chatham First	

2.3 Encourage active and accessible outdoor recreation				
Explore the feasibility of establishing a recreation park on the south side of Chatham	Long	Town of Chatham	Chatham First, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec	
Incorporate additional amenities into public parks and community centers	Medium	Town of Chatham	Chatham First, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec	
Improve existing trails to accommodate strollers and wheelchairs	Medium	Town of Chatham	Chatham First, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec	
Increase the number of public benches through the town	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., business owners	
2.4 Increase opportunities and amenities for youth				
Consider the establishment of a splash pad	Long	Town of Chatham	Chatham First Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec	
Encourage childcare service providers to come to Chatham	Medium	Town of Chatham, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Pittsylvania County ED	
2.5 Develop a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy				
Create a centralized information platform	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., business owners, Pittsylvania County ED	
Establish a physical information kiosk	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., business owners, Pittsylvania County ED	
Leverage social media	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., business owners, Pittsylvania County ED	
Collaborate with local media	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., business owners, Pittsylvania County ED	
Implement targeted outreach	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., business owners, Pittsylvania County ED	
Engage with community groups	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, other civic orgs., business owners, Pittsylvania County ED	
2.6 Strengthen partnerships with Hargrave Military Academy & Chatham Hall				
Leverage their facilities for public use	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec	

Improve marketing efforts for shared facilities	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec	
Utilize properties as key components of community trail system	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County Parks and Rec	
Housing				
	Priority	Lead	Partners	Notes
3.1 Prioritize housing that attracts young people				
Prioritize the development of housing options that meet their needs and preferences	Medium	Town of Chatham, private developer	PDC	
Investigate funding opportunities for affordable and workforce housing initiatives	Medium	PDC	Town of Chatham	
3.2 Address dilapidated lots and vacant homes to encourage investment or sale				
Pursue a Virginia Housing planning study to conduct a housing needs assessment	Short	Town of Chatham or non-profit housing provider	PDC, Chatham First	Grants up to $15,000 available for municipalities or non-profit housing providers
Initiate a coordinated cleaning effort		Chatham First	Town of Chatham, property owners	
Consider implementing an uninhabited building tax	Medium	Town of Chatham	Property owners	
Enforce Certificates of Occupancy requirements	Medium	Town of Chatham	Property owners	
3.3 Explore feasible options for senior housing				
Encourage the development of patio homes	Long	Town of Chatham, private developer	PDC	
3.4 Explore options for downtown second-floor housing				
Pursue a Virginia Housing planning grant to fund a feasibility study	Short	Town of Chatham or non-profit housing provider	PDC, Chatham First	Grants up to $15,000 available for municipalities or non-profit housing providers
Engage with downtown property owners	Short	Town of Chatham or non-profit housing provider	PDC, Chatham First	
3.5 Explore additional opportunities for increasing Chatham's housing stock				
Encourage the development of mixed-use housing projects	Medium	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County ED	PDC	

Identify opportunity sites for expanding Chatham's housing stock	Short	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County ED	Chatham First, PDC	
Explore the feasibility of extending Peach Street to Route 57	Long	Town of Chatham	PDC	
3.6 Make Chatham attractive for developers and builders				
Explore and implement financial incentives for residential developers	Medium	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County ED	PDC	
Develop a strategy to leverage broadband internet as a key attractor for remote workers	Medium	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County ED	PDC	
3.7 Ensure new housing is compatible with existing housing				
Consider implementing design guidelines	Medium	Town of Chatham	Chatham First, Chatham Rotary Foundation	
Investigate the feasibility of creating a residential plans library	Medium	Town of Chatham	Chatham First, Chatham Rotary Foundation	
Support homeowners in navigating residential historic tax credit applications	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania Historical Society	
Small Business & Economic Development				
	Priority	Lead	Partners	Notes
4.1 Create model for downtown revitalization				
Consider a downtown business development model	Short	Chatham First, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Town of Chatham, Local businesses	
Focus first on mobilization and capacity building leading towards ad dedicated downtown model	Short	Chatham First, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Town of Chatham, Local businesses	
Conduct discovery visits to learn about downtown revitalization organizations and catalyst projects	Short	Chatham Rotary Foundation	Town of Chatham, Local businesses	These could be day or half-day trips that should be coordinated in advance. Take a tour of the downtown, meet with the local downtown organization, and discuss structure and catalyst projects.
Clearly define roles in partnership of the Town, Reimagine Chatham, downtown business association	Short	Chatham Rotary Foundation	Town of Chatham, Chatham First	
4.2 Increase access to local goods and fresh produce				

Share market research with existing and potential business owners and partners	Short	Chatham Rotary Foundation	Town of Chatham, Private businesses & property owners, Pittsylvania County ED, Danville Area Chamber	
Recruit small independent grocer or fresh foods market in the North Main area	Medium	Town of Chatham, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Downtown business development entity, Private property owners, Pittsylvania County ED, Danville Chamber	Downtown business development entity refers to strategy 4.5
Recruit new business and encourage expansion of existing businesses based on market research	Medium	Town of Chatham, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Downtown business development entity, Private property owners, Pittsylvania County ED, Danville Chamber	Downtown business development entity refers to strategy 4.5
Consider exploring other cooperative business models for utilizing large retail space	Medium	Town of Chatham, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Downtown business development entity, Private property owners, Pittsylvania County ED, Danville Chamber	Downtown business development entity refers to strategy 4.5
Consider incentives for new or expanding businesses	Medium	Town of Chatham	Pittsylvania County ED	
Review boundaries of existing enterprise zone, determine if they need to be expanded	Short	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County ED	Pittsylvania County IDA	
Explore opportunities for enterprise zones to be aligned with historic districts	Short	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County ED	Pittsylvania County IDA	
4.3 Develop a strategy to attract diverse restaurants and destination businesses				
Recruit restaurant offerings based on demand	Short	Town of Chatham, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Downtown business development entity, Private property owners, Pittsylvania County ED, Danville Chamber	Downtown business development entity refers to strategy 4.5
Recruit niche business based on demand	Short	Town of Chatham, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Downtown business development entity, Private property owners, Pittsylvania County ED, Danville Chamber	Downtown business development entity refers to strategy 4.5
Create strong business support and educational process to ensure new businesses have viable work plan	Short	Chatham Rotary Foundation, Danville Chamber	Private business, Longwood SBDC, Town of Chatham	Networking, shared marketing

Facilitate small business educational programming and business planning	Medium	Chatham Rotary Foundation, Danville Chamber	Private business, Longwood SBDC, Town of Chatham	The Gauntlet or CBL
4.4 Market Chatham both locally and beyond				
Capitalize on regional position, while focusing on internal growth through collaboration	Short	Chatham First, ODAC	Visit Sosi	
Continue to engage with Chatham Hall and Hargrave to understand opportunities for partnership	Short	Chatham First, Chatham Hall, Hargrave	Visit Sosi	
Encourage local businesses to offer paid internships to students	Short	Chatham Rotary Foundation	Chatham Hall, Hargrave, Longwood SBDC	
Encourage local property owners to consider short term lodging listings	Short	Chatham Rotary Foundation, Private property owner	Visit Sosi	
Consider development of small, boutique-style hotel product	Long	Town of Chatham, Private developer, Chatham Rotary Foundation	Pittsylvania County IDA, Chatham First, ODAC, Pittsylvania County ED	Would be significant partnership, to include funders that could be DHCD, VTC, Tobacco Commission, Daniel Regional Foundation, etc.
4.5 Tell Chatham's unique story				
Establish unified effort to market the community, its destinations and businesses	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Rotary Foundation	
Develop branding & marketing plan	Short	Chatham First	Town of Chatham, Pittsylvania County, Rotary Foundation, Visit Sosi	$17,000 - $22,000 (in conjunction with goal 1.1)
Promote the history of Gilbert and Sugar Hill, other African American neighborhoods and businesses	Short	Chatham First	Pittsylvania Historical Society, Neighborhood and business representatives	
Identify funding through grants from VTC or VDOT	Medium	Chatham First	Town of Chatham	